

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-11 INR-10 LAB-06

NSAE-00 RSC-01 SIL-01 AGR-20 AID-20 OMB-01 DODE-00

PM-07 H-03 L-03 NSC-10 PA-04 PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-20

USIA-15 DRC-01 /150 W

----- 106415

R 271730Z DEC 73

FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8714

INFO AMCONSUL BOMBAY

AMCONSUL CALCUTTA

AMCONSUL MADRAS

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ELAB, ETRN, IN

SUBJ: RAIL STRIKE CALLED OFF: BUT AVIATION LOCKOUT CONTINUES

REF: NEW DELHI 14979, NEW DELHI 9462

SUMMARY

ALTHOUGH INDIA'S DOMESTIC AIRLINE (INDIAN AIRLINES) CONTINUES TO OPERATE ONLY SKELETON SERVICES, DISRUPTION OF THE COUNTRY'S TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM HAS BEEN EASED, FOR THE TIME BEING AT LEAST, BY DECEMBER 24 CALL BY LEADERS OF ALL INDIA LOCO RUNNING STAFF ASSOCIATION (AILRSA) FOR LOCOMEN TO END THEIR 10-DAY STOPPAGE. ATTENDANCE BY LOCOMEN REPORTEDLY HAS NOW IMPROVED SUFFICIENTLY FOR RAILWAY MINISTRY TO ANNOUNCE INTRODUCTION OF NORMAL PASSENGER AND FREIGHT SERVICES ALTHOUGH SOME DISLOCATION OF RAIL TRAFFIC IN NORTHERN, CENTRAL, EASTERN AND SOUTH-EASTERN INDIA CONTINUES DUE TO LOCAL UNREST AMONG RAILWAYMEN.

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END SUMMARY.

1. APPARENTLY IN RETURN FOR ENDING STRIKE, AIRSRA LEADERS RECEIVED FROM RAIL MINISTER AMBIGUOUS ASSURANCES OF NO VICTIMIZATION OF STRIKERS, AGREEMENT "TO LOOK INTO" LOCOMEN'S GRIEVANCES AND CONSIDER FURTHER "THE PROCESS OF IMPLEMENTATION" TO REDUCE WORKING SHIFTS FROM 14 TO 10 HOURS, AND PROMISE OF EXPANDED SCOPE FOR LOCOMEN'S GRIEVANCE MACHINERY WITHOUT GRANTING AIRSRA FORMAL RECOGNITION.

2. THROUGHOUT STRIKE, LOCOMEN'S UNION (AIRSRA) FACED RESISTANCE OF THE TWO RECOGNIZED RAILWAY FEDERATIONS, THE CONGRESS PARTY-ALIGNED NATIONAL FEDERATION OF INDIAN RAILWAYMEN (NFIR) AND THE SOCIALIST PARTY-ORIENTED ALL INDIAN RAILWAYMEN'S FEDERATION (AIRF) WHO KEPT THEIR MEMBERS WORKING. FOR ITS PART, GOI HAD MADE DECISION NOT TO CONCEDE LOCOMEN UNION'S DEMAND FOR RECOGNITION IN VIEW THE CHAIN EFFECT RECOGNITION LIKELY WOULD HAVE IN FRAGMENTING THE UNION STRUCTURE AND BARGAINING IN THE INDUSTRY, INTO JOB CATEGORIES - MORE THAN 700 OF THEM ON THE RAILWAYS.

3. ALTHOUGH NEGOTIATIONS WITH UNIONS CONTINUE, MANAGEMENT OF INDIAN AIRLINES (IA) MAINTAINING LOCKOUT DECLARED NOVEMBER 24 AND PRESSING EFFORTS TO UNDERCUT SOLIDARITY OF (POLITICALLY UNALIGNED) AVIATION UNIONS. IA MANAGEMENT DECEMBER 21 ANNOUNCED IT WAS LIFTING LOCKOUT FOR INDIVIDUAL EMPLOYEES WHO SIGN AGREEMENTS "ACCEPTING MANAGEMENT'S NEW SHIFT PATTERN AND AGREEING TO PROPOSALS AIMED AT ENDING WASTEFUL PRACTICES". ABOUT 10,000 OF 16,000 AVIATION EMPLOYEES STILL REPORTED TO BE OUT AS A RESULT OF LOCKOUT. MANAGEMENT CLAIMS SOME 2,000 WHO WERE OUT HAVE SIGNED AGREEMENTS AND HAS ANNOUNCED AN "ENLARGED SKELTON SERVICE" EFFECTIVE DECEMBER 27.

4. COMMENT: HANDLING OF BOTH DISPUTES REFLECT INCREASINGLY TOUGH GOVERNMENT POSTURE IN DEALING WITH ORGANIZED LABOR AND PARTICULARLY MRS. GANDHI'S PERSONAL IMPATIENCE WITH CONTINUING LABOR DISPUTES WHICH GOI MINISTERS HAVE LABELED AS "LUXURY" COUNTRY CANNOT AFFORD. WE ARE INFORMED MRS. GANDHI HAS PERSONALLY SANCTIONED FREE-HAND BY IA CHAIRMAN AIR CHIEF MARSHAL LAL TO HANDLE LABOR DISPUTES AS HE SEES FIT, AS PART OF HIS MANDATE TO REORGANIZE INDIAN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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AIRLINES MORE EFFICIENTLY. IN CASE OF LOCOMEN'S DISPUTE, HOWEVER, SENIOR CONGRESS M.P.S AND TRADE UNION LEADERS WHILE BACKING GOI, CAME INTO OPEN CONFLICT WITH COP-ORIENTED LABOR MINISTER RAGHUNATHA REDDY WHO EMERGED AS ACTIVE INTERMEDIARY IN SETTLING DISPUTE. IN PRIVATE CONVERSATIONS, THE ACCUSE REDDY OF EXPLOITING DISPUTE IN COLLUSION WITH CPI ELEMENTS IN LOCOMEN'S UNIM AND CPI M.P.S TO ESTABLISH A CPI TRADE UNION POSITION IN THE RAILWAYS AT THE EXPENSE OF

THE TWO RECOGNIZED FEDERATIONS (NFIR AND AIRF).
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